



Frontier Folklore & Pioneer Prose from Harvey County

by Darren McMannis

A Story of Love:

Frank & Viola Barnes

"MARRIED. BARNES-MOURN. - At the residence of and by Justice Baughman, on Dec. 31st, 1881, Mr. Frank Barnes to Miss Viola M. Mourn, all of Valley township Reno County, Kansas." This simple announcement in the local news hid the joy and anticipation of a new life together on the prairie.¹

We don't know much about their life together. They lived a stable life on their farm northwest of Burrton, Kansas, as evidenced by the 1900 and 1910 census. They did lose a couple of children very young, and were blessed with several who lived.

The next time we find Mr. Barnes in the newspaper was April, 1914, when his love for his son and his concern over him became all consuming:

**Took His Own Life. Worry Over Son's Troubles.
Frank D. Barnes Shot Himself to Death
Friday Morning at Valley Township Home.**

Frank D. Barnes, a successful Valley township farmer, residing five northwest of the town and three miles east of Kent, arose about 5:30 this morning, kissed his wife, as was his usual custom, went to the kitchen and started the fire, then returned to the bed-room, again kissed his wife, went out behind the granary and shot himself. The gunshot was heard by his wife who rushed to the yard and found her husband dying with a terrible wound in his abdomen, caused by the charge from the shotgun. The nearest neighbor, J. W. Miller, living across the way, reached him shortly after the wife. Mr. Barnes was still alive and conscious, and able to talk. He told Mr. Miller that it was not an accident, but asked why he did it, he only shook his head. Dr. H. J. Duvall, the family physician, was telephoned, but before he arrived the terribly wounded man died. Surgical aid could not have saved him. Apparently, on leaving the

¹ The Burrton Independent, Burrton, Kansas. Thursday, January 6, 1882. Page 3.

house he picked up the shotgun and a box of shells. He loaded both chambers and cocked both hammers, then placed the barrell of the gun at his abdomen, leaned over and pushed the trigger. Only one was released, but the charge tore a terrible gap through his bowels and stomach. When he was found the other hammer was still cocked, not being discharged. Mr. Barnes was 59 years of age, and one of the old residents of Valley township. He owned a 120 acre farm, was a prosperous farmer, had money in the bank, and there were no financial reverses.

The tragedy is supposed to be the result of unhappiness over domestic trouble in his son's home. His son, Clarence Barnes and wife, young people, have been having trouble at home, and seperated some time ago. The father thought everything of the young couple, and gave them an eighty acre farm, and he was nearly broken-hearted when the home of the young folks was broken up. Clarence is now in Arkansas and his wife is one of the operators at the Santa Fe station at Kent.

Mr. Barnes is survived by his wife and six sons and daughters, Clarence, George and Walter Barnes, Mrs. Jesse Houck and Mrs. Charles Curless and Miss Clara. Walter and Clara live at home, being unmarried. The sad tragedy caused a gloom in the neighborhood this morning, for the deceased was highly regarded as a good citizen, kind husband and father, and a man who was successful and prosperous.²

Many of Frank & Viola's descendents remained in the Burrton area. Clarence and his ex-wife both remarried. Viola Barnes lived the next 45 years alone, until she passed away in 1959. They are buried together in the Burrton Cemetery. While it is neither possible nor profitable to pass any judgment on any of those involved in this story, one thing is clear: Love is a powerful emotion, and divorce never leaves a person unaffected. We can only imagine what Frank was going through in those days before he took his life, and how he felt that morning when he kissed his wife for the very last time.

In honor of Frank's life, his obituary follows:

Frank Douglas Barnes was born November 13, 1854, in McHenry county, Illinois, died March 27, 1914. He emigrated to Kansas in 1877 and was united in Marriage to Miss Viola Maria Mourn, Dec. 31, 1881, and soon after settled on a homestead in Valley township. To this union nine children were born, seven of whom are living. He was converted at the age of 20 to the Christian Church but after his marriage united with the U. B. Church. He lived a devout Christian life; endeavoring to be good and do good. Every one he knew or came in contact with knew him as an upright, God fearing man. He was a

² The Burrton Tribune, Burrton Kansas. April 2, 1914. Page 1.

loving husband and father, a good neighbor, respected and admired by all who knew him. He was assistant superintendent and teacher in the Sunflower Sunday School. His death is a great loss to the community and he will be missed by all. He leaves a wife and seven children to mourn his passing.³



³ The Burrton Tribune, Burrton, Kansas. Thursday, April 9, 1914. Page 1.